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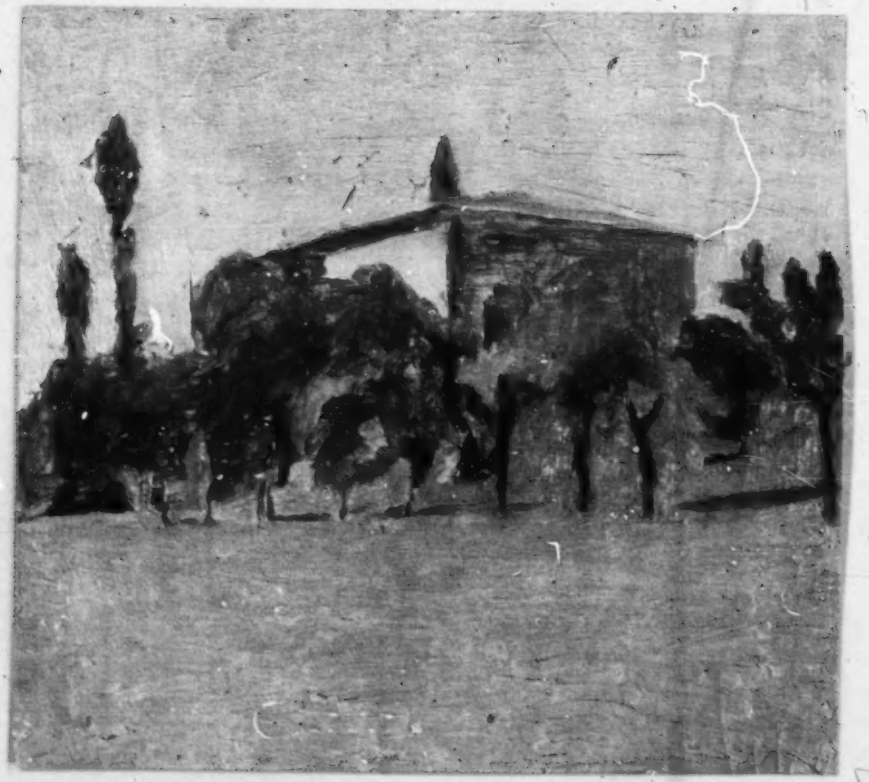
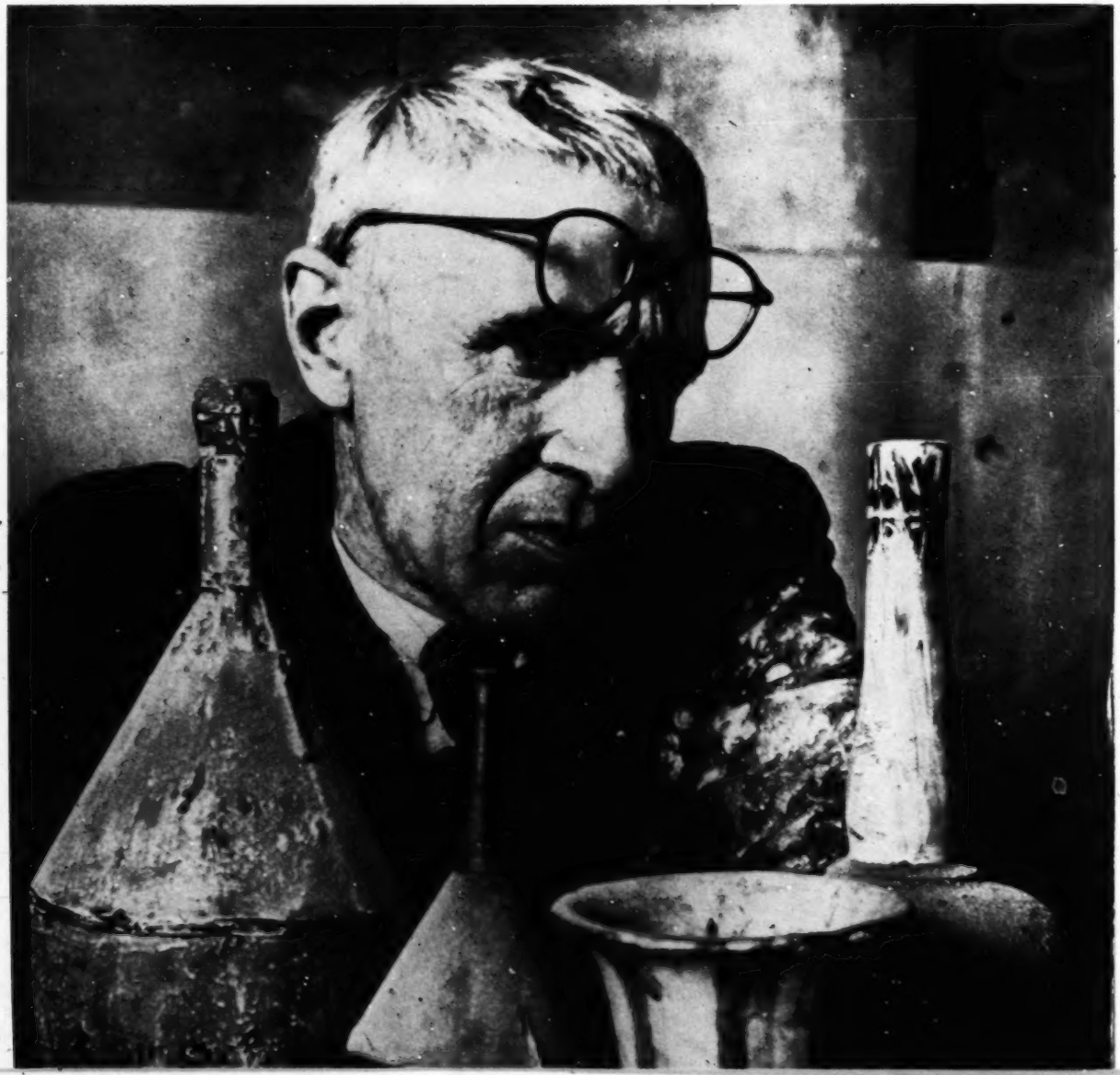


1954 The Arts Council of Great Britain

Giorgio Morandi

Giorgio Morandi

1954 *The Arts Council of Great Britain* **Giorgio Morandi** *Paintings & Prints*



It is the Art Council's pleasant duty to welcome this exhibition as one of the cultural exchanges made under the recently concluded Anglo-Italian Cultural Convention and we are most grateful to Dr De Angelis d'Ossat, Direttore Generale delle Antichita e Belle Arti, Ministero della Pubblica Instruzione, Rome, through whose good offices the arrangements have been made. In particular, thanks are due to the artist's friends, M. Vitale Bloch and Signor Lamberto Vitali, the former for his help in the selection of the paintings and for his introduction to this catalogue, and the latter for lending so generously from his own private collection and for his note on the graphic works.

The exhibition has already been shown in Holland and we are more than ordinarily grateful to the Italian owners of the pictures for extending their loans and thus giving the British public their first opportunity of enjoying the distinguished work of one of Italy's greatest contemporary painters. Signor Gino Ghiringhelli has most kindly given the colour plates which are used in this catalogue.

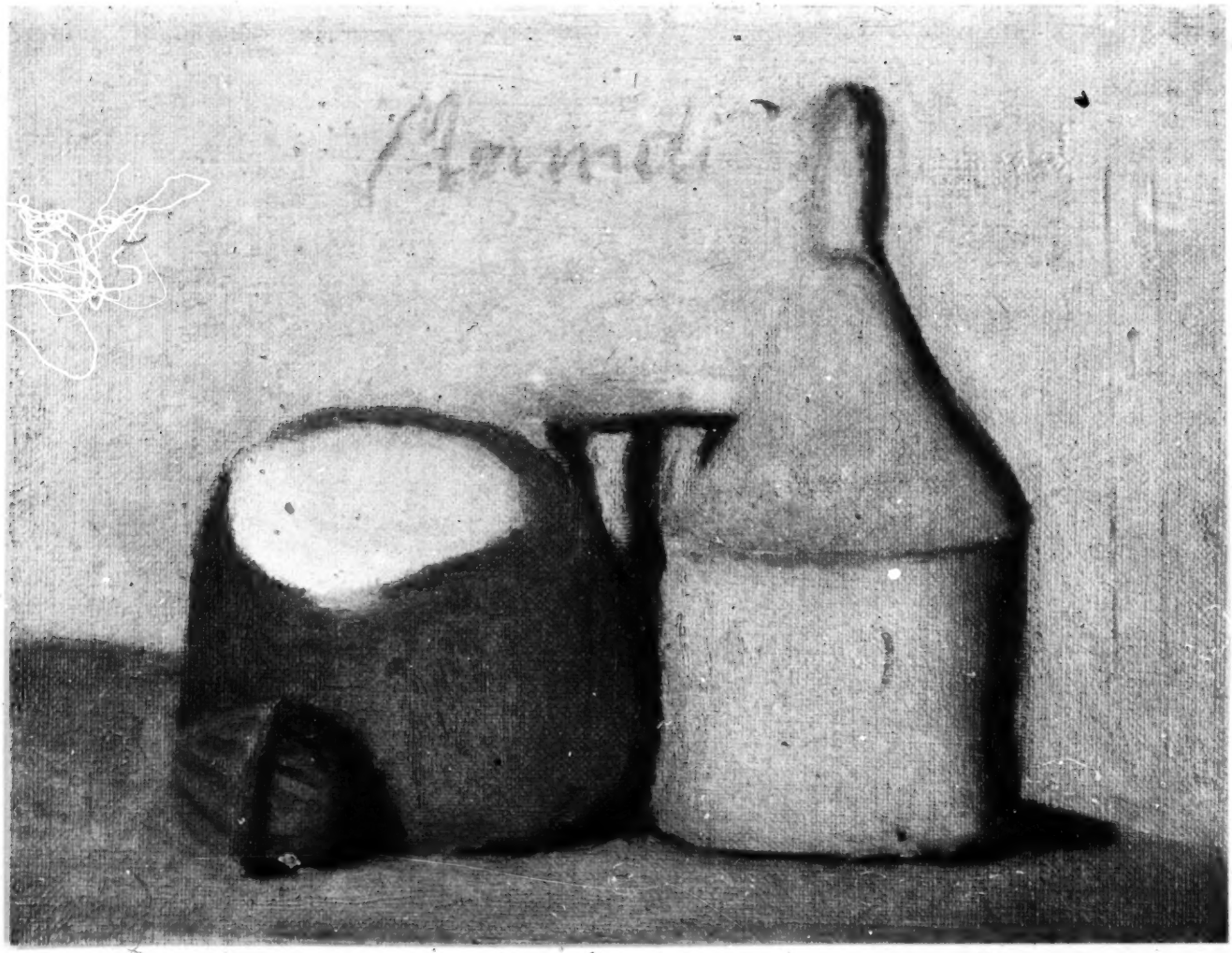
Philip James

In opposition to the incoherence, empty words and shallow rhetoric of artists, as well as of amateurs of art, Giorgio Morandi sets up his reserve, his discretion, and his silence. He does not belong to the class of painter-writer so common in his country – Chirico, Carrà, and Severini, among others. Equally alien to him is the attitude of the 'patron' Braque. I do not know a line of Morandi's that could be used for propaganda of any kind. Morandi the man expresses himself solely and wholly in Morandi the artist. The painter's appearance has often been compared with a monk; his studio and his house seem to belong to another era, an era which has come to a standstill at the Via Fondazza in Bologna (see 'Bij Giorgio Morandi', *Maanblad voor Beeldende Kunsten*, August 1950, pages 191–4).

Morandi, who has never been outside Italy, is a Professor of Graphic Art at the Academy of Bologna. He was born in 1890 and became acquainted with the great French painters Renoir and Seurat, and especially Cézanne who constituted a starting point for him, at various exhibitions mostly in Venice. Probably the impact of the great masters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contributed to the shaping of his mind. Morandi still talks about his first day in Florence and how he visited the Uffizi and the churches with frescoes by Giotto, Paolo Uccello, and Masaccio. In the evening following that day he lay in bed with a high fever. Roberto Longhi, who as early as 1935 in his inaugural address to the University of Bologna praised Morandi, once gave a list of the painter's 'deities': Giotto, Masaccio, Uccello, Piero della Francesca, Bellini, Titian, Chardin, Corot, and Cézanne. This list conjures up volumes.

The close link between feeling and method of expression in Morandi's work is decisive for the understanding of it. Unlike most of his contemporaries he never abandoned the road which he had once chosen. He forged his own path in art as did the old masters – Corot, Chardin, Vermeer – and never allowed the songs of the sirens to tempt him. This is also the reason why his work has such incomparable moral impact and why it has the sombre note of a *rappel à l'ordre*.

It appears to be very difficult to give an impression in words of the poetry in Morandi's still lifes or his landscapes. It seems to me that Cesare Gnudi (Florence 1946) and Francesco Arcangeli (Milan 1950) have succeeded best in


Aranoti

finding the right words. I quote some lines in which, in my opinion, Arcangeli very happily expresses the essence of Morandi's art: 'Two eyes which silently affirm to everyone the permanence of a confidence in the world one believed to be lost, of a balance between mind and matter which seemed to be disrupted; two eyes which accept things as they are, which are at the root of the vision of the great Impressionist masters, but which shift the focus, unobtrusively, to accord with the optic field that is also the field of our consciousness.' (*Morandi*, 12 *Opere*, Milan 1956, page 8).

For the first time we shall be able to survey Morandi's paintings and his graphic work chronologically. There are some landscapes and still lifes from the earliest time (1911, 1914, 1916) chosen because of their interest, but we shall also find some of the most important works of the metaphysical phase (1918–20), some – and these are rare – landscapes from the 1920's and 1930's and the important landscape series from the war years (1940–3). Finally, there are flower pieces, some of them from the metaphysical phase, and a large group of the famous bottle still lifes with which Morandi's name is most closely associated. About forty prints, half of his entire graphic *œuvre* all of them from the wonderful collection of Lamberto Vitali, the artist's friend, contribute immensely to an understanding of Morandi's personality.

Within the scope of this introduction we must refrain from a detailed criticism and review of Morandi's work, but it may be useful to add a short commentary on some aspects of it.

As early as in the metaphysical years, Morandi's art seems to be free of the cargo of the Graeco-German culture of Chirico. He was hardly even influenced by the delicate humour and poetic irony of Carrà. In comparison to the true metaphysicists, Morandi is a purist.

The bottle still lifes which form the core of his art may be grouped according to various points of view, that is, according to composition, colour, and mood. The monotony of which Morandi has been accused because of his 'bottles' is confined to his subject matter. It appears on the surface only, one would say rather in the eye of the beholder. However, he who looks below the surface knows that hardly two of Morandi's still lifes are similar. It is

the miracle of his genius that out of the humblest boxes, tin cans, outmoded oil lamps, and dusty bottles, emerge works of art full of poetry and often most justly called 'songs without words'.

The diversity of experiences, poetical as well as musical, which these still lifes are able to evoke is truly miraculous. Morandi's still lifes can be melancholy or romantic, tender or playful in conception and execution. Some are strong in colour, others subtle in light and shade. There is also a great variety in the 'human' relationship of the objects to one another. The careful observer will soon learn to follow the artist's development: it leads in the direction of stillness, monumentality, and absolute purity. The reproach of monotony in Morandi's work seems to me as little tenable as some people's objection to his lack of 'humanity'.

This is not the place to go deeply into the reason why he refrains from representing the human form. Is anyone at all able to picture a Morandi work of this kind? It is essential to state that the 'humanity' of an artist cannot be deduced from his subject. Brandi has said quite rightly that nothing is less abstract, nothing less indifferent to sadness, less deaf to joy, than the art of Morandi who seems to retire to the edge of life. Morandi's landscapes are just as little narrative and descriptive as his still lifes. He only holds on to the essentials of the theme, to the unchanging characteristics of nature, to the bold lines of fields, hills, and houses.

For his flower still lifes he generally uses paper roses. These are like *vers d'occasion* and in them the gracefulness, the stillness, and the resignation which are eloquent of the soul of this artist find their most direct expression.

The country of Rembrandt and Vermeer had the honour of organizing the first comprehensive exhibition of the work of this Bolognese master. Let us hope that the renewed acquaintance with the balanced and lyrical world of Morandi will provide for Londoners an unforgettable experience, not only for painters and connoisseurs, but also for the wider public.

Vitale Bloch

The graphic work of Giorgio Morandi proves the rule that for over a century the fate of the etching has lain in the hands of the '*peintre-graveurs*' rather than in the hands of the actual etchers; Morandi, however, proves the rule in a way all his own. What I mean is that the etchings of this Bolognese artist show no traces of being the fruit of sudden inspiration and solved with a quick synthetic loose line, nor is there any complacent use of the formal arabesque. Morandi's graphic work, therefore, is not a by-product, but an essential element for the understanding and appreciation of his personality as an artist.

His etchings and paintings are inseparable from one another, for they are born of the same urge, the same source of inspiration; they speak the same language, although through the medium of different techniques. They are the result of profound meditation and poetic thinking: a meditation and reflection which materialize in the noble artistry of the composition, with its consummately skilled balance of spaces and the interplay of spaces, and take shape in the perfection of the tone relations, which are so precise in their modulations and refined to the ultimate possibilities of this technique.

Certain ranges of silver-grey, certain pure moonlight whites, certain extremely fine transitions, which we really believe to be exceptional not only in contemporary graphic art, could only have been realized by patient craftsmanship which does not make use of the isolated autonomous line, but of a series of lines or rather a series of groups of lines which gradually cross and recross and are superimposed the one on the other.

In the etchings even more, sometimes, than in the paintings whose motives they repeat – often after the lapse of years – an ineffable grace is united with an ever lucid and severe spirit of reasoning: the gift of lyric evocation of the appearances of reality is united with an organizing logic. It seems to me beyond doubt that we can discern in the etching plates of recent years a more profound expression, for Morandi's graphic language is becoming increasingly more refined and more sensitive; he absolutely rejects any kind of routine and any kind of mechanical virtuosity. His exemplary classic simplicity and sound craftsmanship leave nothing to the whims of the etching acid and ask only of the etching plate what it is able to yield.

It is no small proof of Giorgio Morandi's artistic conscience that he bends with such humility and devotion over his etching plate just at the moment when he has reached the peak of his development.

L. Vitali

Giorgio Morandi has, since 1910, done about ninety etchings, but his two periods of major production were from 1921–4 and from 1927–33.

Acknowledgements are due to the following owners who have so generously lent their works for this exhibition:

Prof. Francesco Arcangeli, Bologna
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Giovanni Scheiwiller, Milan
Gr. Uff. Eugenio Ventura, Florence
G. Vismara, Milan
Lamberto Vitali

Paintings

1 **Landscape** 1911 $15\frac{3}{4} \times 18\frac{1}{8}$ in.

2 **Still Life** 1912 $21 \times 14\frac{1}{4}$ in.

3 **Landscape** 1914 $33\frac{3}{4} \times 25\frac{1}{4}$ in.

4 **Still Life with a Silver Plate** 1914 $26\frac{1}{2} \times 21\frac{1}{4}$ in.

5 **Still Life with Vase** 1916 26×22 in.

6 **Landscape** 1916 15×21 in.

7 **Tall Vase with Flowers** 1918 $32\frac{1}{2} \times 26\frac{1}{2}$ in.

8 **Still Life with Figure** 1918 $18\frac{1}{2} \times 32\frac{3}{4}$ in.

9 **Metaphysical Still Life** 1918 $25\frac{1}{4} \times 20\frac{7}{8}$ in.

10 **Metaphysical Still Life** 1919 $21\frac{3}{8} \times 20\frac{1}{2}$ in.

11 **Metaphysical Still Life** 1919 $18\frac{1}{2} \times 22\frac{1}{8}$ in.

12 **Still Life** 1920 25×13 in.

13 **Still Life on a Table** 1920 $18\frac{1}{4} \times 15\frac{3}{8}$ in.

14 **Roses in a White Vase** 1920 $24 \times 26\frac{3}{8}$ in.

15 **Still Life** 1924 $19\frac{3}{4} \times 23\frac{3}{8}$ in.

16 **Wild Flowers** 1924 $15\frac{3}{4} \times 18\frac{1}{4}$ in.

17 **Red House** 1929 $18\frac{1}{8} \times 16\frac{3}{8}$ in.

18 **Still Life with Bowl of Fruit** 1930 $17\frac{1}{4} \times 25$ in.

19 **Still Life with Bowl of Fruit** 1931 $19\frac{1}{4} \times 24\frac{3}{4}$ in.

20 **Still Life with a Yellow Cloth** undated $27\frac{1}{2} \times 26\frac{3}{4}$ in.

21 **Ploughed Fields** 1932 $21\frac{1}{4} \times 25\frac{1}{2}$ in.

22 **Still Life** 1939 $18\frac{7}{8} \times 25\frac{1}{4}$ in.

23 **Landscape** 1941 $15 \times 18\frac{1}{8}$ in.

24 **Landscape** 1941 $20\frac{1}{2} \times 19$ in.

25 **Still Life in Blue** 1941 $15 \times 17\frac{3}{8}$ in.

26 **Still Life with Coffee-pot** 1941 12¼ × 25 in.

27 **Still Life** 1942 17⅜ × 15⅝ in.

28 **Still Life** 1942 17¼ × 20 in.

29 **Wild Flowers** 1942 7⅞ × 11⅞ in.

30 **Landscape** 1943 19¼ × 20⅞ in.

31 **Flowers** 1943 10¼ × 7⅞ in.

32 **Landscape** 1943 19¼ × 20⅞ in.

33 **Mountain Landscape** 1943 19¼ × 20⅞ in.

34 **Landscape** 1943 14½ × 15 in.

35 **House with Poplars** 1943 18⅞ × 19¾ in.

36 **Landscape** 1943 19 × 20½ in.

37 **Landscape** 1943 16½ × 20⅞ in.

38 **Landscape with Two Houses** 1944 19⅜ × 13¾ in.

39 **Roses** 1945 8¾ × 9¾ in.

40 **Still Life** 1946/7 14½ × 18½ in.

41 **Still Life** 1946/7 11 × 20½ in.

42 **Still Life – Roses** undated 10⅜ × 15⅜ in.

43 **Dark Roses** 1947 11⅞ × 12 in.

44 **Blue Counterpoint** 1948 15⅞ × 9½ in.

45 **Still Life** 1948 14½ × 11 in.

46 **Still Life in White and Green** 1948 13 × 15 in.

47 **Flowers in a Vase** 1948 9 × 6¾ in.

48 **Flowers** undated 12⅜ × 9¾ in.

49 **Still Life** 1949 17 × 18½ in.

50 **Still Life** 1949 11⅞ × 19¾ in.

51 **Still Life** 1949 13¾ × 10⅜ in.

52 **Still Life** 1949 $11\frac{7}{8} \times 19\frac{3}{4}$ in.

53 **Still Life** 1949 $12 \times 17\frac{3}{4}$ in.

54 **Flowers** 1950 $16\frac{3}{4} \times 17\frac{5}{8}$ in.

55 **Still Life** 1950 $15 \times 17\frac{3}{4}$ in.

56 **Still Life** 1950 $7\frac{7}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{2}$ in.

57 **Still Life with Salad Bowl** 1950 $15\frac{3}{4} \times 17\frac{5}{8}$ in.

58 **Flowers** 1951 $11\frac{1}{2} \times 11\frac{1}{8}$ in.

59 **Still Life** 1952 $13 \times 17\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Graphic Works

60 **Landscape** 1912 $6\frac{1}{4} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$ in.

61 **Landscape** 1913 $6\frac{1}{4} \times 9$ in.

62 **Still Life** 1915 $5\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$ in.

63 **Landscape** 1929 $9\frac{5}{8} \times 10\frac{1}{4}$ in.

64 **Still Life** 1921 $4 \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ in.

65a **Still Life** 1921 $1\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ in.

b **Still Life** 1921 $2\frac{3}{8} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ in.

c **Landscape** 1921 $2\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$ in.

66 **Still Life** 1922 $2\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{8}$ in.

67 **Landscape** 1923 $2\frac{1}{8} \times 3\frac{5}{8}$ in.

68 **Flowers** 1924 $7\frac{7}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ in.

69 **Flowers** 1924 $9\frac{5}{8} \times 7\frac{3}{4}$ in.

70 **Landscape** 1924 6×6 in.

71 **Landscape** 1927 $9 \times 11\frac{1}{8}$ in.

72 **Landscape** 1927 $10\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{3}{4}$ in.

73 **Landscape** 1927 $12\frac{3}{4} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in.

74 **Landscape** 1928 $9\frac{3}{4} \times 5\frac{1}{4}$ in.

75 **Still Life** '1917' 1928 9⅜ × 7 in.
76 **Flowers** 1928 9½ × 6⅛ in.
77 **Flowers** 1928 7⅞ × 6¼ in.
78 **Landscape** 1929 10 × 9½ in.
79 **Flowers** 1929 12⅜ × 9⅞ in.
80 **Landscape** 1929 8⅞ × 13½ in.
81 **Still Life** 1930 9½ × 11⅛ in.
82 **Still Life** 1930 11⅞ × 14¼ in.
83 **Still Life** 1930 7½ × 11⅛ in.
84 **Landscape** 1931 9⅜ × 9⅜ in.
85 **Still Life** 1931 9⅛ × 11½ in.
86 **Flowers** 1931 8⅞ × 7½ in.
87 **Still Life** 1931 6¾ × 7⅜ in.
88 **Landscape** 1932 8½ × 12⅞ in.
89 **Landscape** 1932 7¼ × 6⅞ in.
90 **Landscape** 1932 6½ × 7⅞ in.
91 **Still Life** about 1933 5½ × 7⅜ in.
92 **Still Life** 1933 11½ × 15 in.
93 **Flowers** 1933 11½ × 7⅜ in.
94 **Still Life** 1933 9 × 9⅛ in.
95 **Still Life** 1933 9⅜ × 8¾ in.
96 **Still Life** 1933 9½ × 9¾ in.
97 **Landscape** 1933 7¾ × 11⅞ in.
98 **Still Life** 1933 9½ × 9½ in.
99 **Still Life** 1942 10⅜ × 11¾ in.
100 **Still Life** 1945 6⅞ × 5⅛ in.

Lund Humphries